

# FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

March 2006

## PENSIONS

The latest on  
FBU's campaign



WIN  
AN  
iPOD  
see p22

## FLAMING WEATHER

Climate change – the big picture



**Regional control centres**  
97% say no

**What does Alan do?**  
The forefront of prevention



**Day off on  
the hill**

**Heather and her mountain**

# Pensions, control and your new magazine



WELCOME to your new-look firefighter. As you will see, your magazine has been through a re-design. We have also given further consideration to the content and there have been a few changes here as well. These changes followed discussion with Firefighter reps from around the UK. We hope that you like the new look and content. Remember, it's your magazine so please feel free to write (or e-mail) in to let us know your views.

## Pensions, pensions, pensions

Our recall conference in Southport followed a week of detailed discussions with the ODPM. Those talks only took place as a result of the determination shown by FBU members and officials. We sent a clear message that we were prepared to fight on pensions if necessary. That message was heard loud and clear in Whitehall.

This was a difficult conference for delegates to deal with because the situation changed very quickly over the last week. The consensus which emerged was that because of the changes being proposed members on branches had the right to be able to consider the new position.

We need a measured assessment of where we are – what has been achieved and what has not been achieved. We

are clearly dissatisfied at some of the remaining proposals particularly those concerning ill-health benefits for current FPS members.

On the other hand we have seen welcome movement on the retirement age for members of the existing scheme. For emergency fire control staff we have made a start. It is progress and we shall be assessing how we proceed very carefully.

We have protected firefighters working the retained duty system. They could have lost out significantly if they were injured on duty.

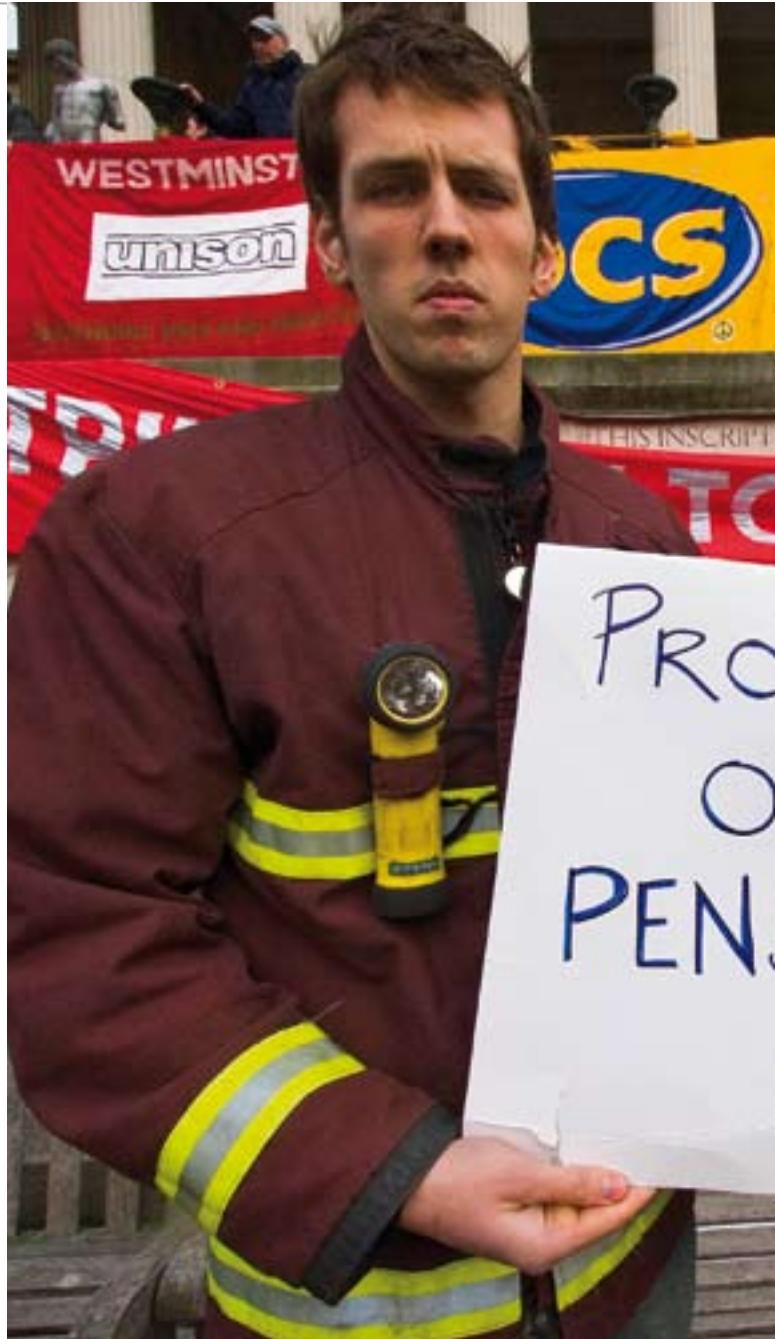
We were also concerned at moves to take Flexi Duty Allowance and other allowances out of pensionable pay. They will remain as pensionable pay.

The strength of the FBU was that we spoke for every part of the fire and rescue service. We didn't just talk for wholetime or retained or officers or control.

We spoke and acted as the united voice of the fire service. That is our strength.

You will now get a chance to see these proposals in detail. We want you to consider them carefully.

Nobody likes or agrees with the detrimental changes but we need to consider whether strike



action will move us any further forward.

If members say these changes are not acceptable and that strike action is necessary then we would start the balloting process very quickly. The view of conference was that a ballot should not now take place – but it is members who will decide.

**You will now get a chance to see these proposals in detail. We want you to consider them carefully**

## Controls – our own proposals

Meanwhile our campaign on the proposed regionalisation of fire controls has also developed in recent weeks. The Select Committee of the ODPM has been conducting an inquiry into the fire service and into the regionalisation issue. The Union submitted detailed written evidence to this. A team from the FBU also attended Westminster to give evidence to the Select Committee. Thanks must go to all those who were involved at whatever level in this work.

We also launched our own proposals on controls. Our document on 'Resilience'



ANDREW WARD

Controls' has created a significant debate within the fire service. I hope that you have all had the opportunity to read it. It is based upon the real experience of the service and the professional opinions of those who work within it. In contrast the ODPM's proposals for regionalisation are being foisted on the service. The truth is that there is widespread opposition and concern at the ODPM project. Our document and our proposals give the service the opportunity to travel in a different direction. We hope the opportunity is taken.

**Matt Wrack**

FBU members at the national public sector pensions day of action in February 2005

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#### PUZZLES

Take part in our prize quiz and win an Apple iPod. This month test your musical knowledge and get the opportunity to be plugged in to your favourite sounds 24/7.



**WIN  
AN  
iPOD**  
see p22

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STEPHEN ROUSSEAU/PAP/IMAGES

## Herts cuts set to get green light

**Five stations that were first to respond to Buncefield fire are among those hit**



The sun is eclipsed by smoke as foam is sprayed on to a fuel storage tank at the Buncefield oil depot in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, 48 hours after the fire began on December 11 last year

### HERTFORDSHIRE CUTS

Proposals to cut 50 frontline firefighter jobs in Hertfordshire, close two stations and downgrade cover at two more look set to be approved by the county council at a meeting on 8 March. A group of councillors looking at the plan had earlier concluded the cuts could go ahead.

The decision to continue came after a new call for a public inquiry into the Buncefield fire from Tory leader David Cameron. A Health and Safety Executive investigation is under way and is unlikely to report for some weeks.

The proposals brought thousands of objections from the community during a consultation period. Stations affected include the first five that sent crews to Buncefield.

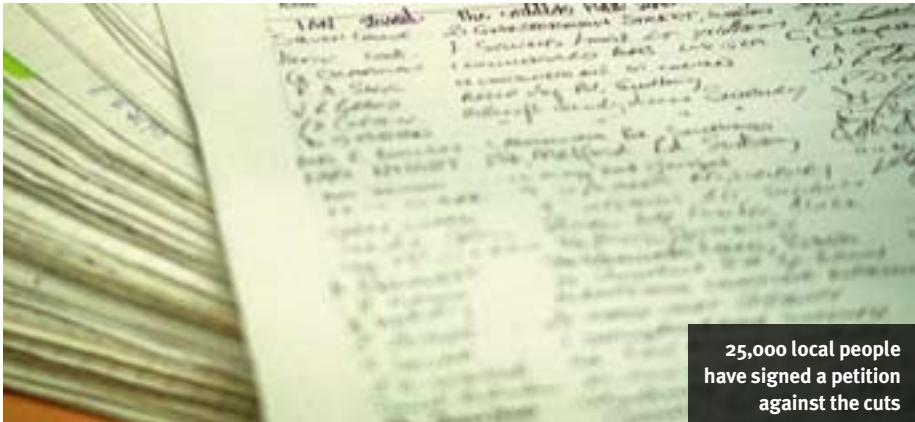
Bovingdon and Radlett are earmarked for closure. Downgraded cover is planned

**'These cuts cannot be in the interests of public safety and we intend to pursue every avenue to stop them'**

at Royston and Watford. Hemel Hempstead, St Albans and Stevenage will also lose firefighters, completing cuts to all of the highest risk areas of the county.

Herts FBU said: "Some of those being told they are no longer required were first on the fireground at Buncefield or providing emergency cover – often short-handed – to the rest of the county during the incident.

"The proposals to cut frontline firefighters and put our members at greater risk should be withdrawn. These cuts cannot be in the interests of public safety and we intend to pursue every avenue to stop them."



**25,000 local people have signed a petition against the cuts**

## MPs urge minister to act

### NORTHUMBERLAND CUTS

MPs have laid into Northumberland fire chief Brian Helser's plans to make cuts to fire cover and called on fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick to intervene on this "life and death" issue for the local community. During an adjournment debate in the House of Commons secured by Blyth Labour MP Ronnie Campbell, Mr Hesler and the fire authority came under attack for a "lack of consultation with the trade union and the general public."

Mr Campbell asked the minister to consider calling a halt to plans that include closures of existing stations in the south-east of the county and the construction of two new remote PFI-financed stations.

He said the minister should take heed of

the serious concerns over longer response times raised by the 25,000 local people who signed a petition. "This is a matter of life and death, yet Northumberland county council is running headlong into this issue," said the MP.

Colin James, Northumberland FBU Chair, said: "The chief officer's plans cannot guarantee two fire engines within ten minutes to anywhere in the south east of the county and will mean a worse response than at present. He also appears unwilling to set any performance target about how often even the slower response will be met.

"These plans will mean a worse service which is more expensive. Our alternative plans would mean effective response times, better community safety and cost council tax payers no extra money".

### ATTACKS ON FIREFIGHTERS

## Bill to create a specific offence

A Private Members Bill which seeks to make it a specific offence to assault, obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters was set to be heard on 24 February.

The Bill follows FBU research – highlighted in previous editions of *Firefighter* – showing attacks on UK fire crews could be running as high as 120 a week.

Incidents include scaffolding poles thrown through windscreens of fire engines; crews attacked with concrete blocks, bricks and bottles; being shot at; spat at; equipment tampered with or stolen; physical assaults on crews; and equipment being urinated on.



A poster highlights the problem. It was produced by the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and the province's Department of Health, Social Service and Public Safety

National officer John McGhee who has been working to secure widespread support from MPs for the Bill said: "At this stage the Government remain to be persuaded the Bill is a good idea, but we have been making some headway."

"It is very difficult to get a Private Members Bill through the Commons but Alan Williams has worked closely with our Parliamentary Support Group on the issue. At the very least the Bill has raised the profile of the problem."

## Sounding off!

### VICKY KNIGHT

Executive Council Member, Women

### International Women's Day should be a bank holiday

Over the years on International Women's Day, women have taken to the streets, sparked off a revolution, and rubbed shoulders with Prime Ministers and Presidents. They have demonstrated at the doors of newspapers and welfare institutions, occupied empty houses as squats for women escaping domestic violence and helped to usher in new legislation – including the right for British women to vote.

Across the UK on March 8 unions and women's organisations will be holding events to celebrate women, secure in the knowledge that across the world similar events will be taking place simultaneously.

International Women's Day is the story of ordinary women as makers of history and to participate in society on an equal footing to men. The idea first arose at the turn of the century. In 1910, the Socialist International meeting in Copenhagen established a Women's Day to honour the movement for women's rights and to assist in universal suffrage for women. As a result of this

In 1914 Russian women observed the last Sunday in February as their first International Women's Day and used it to protest against the first world war

decision, the first International Women's Day was held in Europe on March 19 1911. In 1914 Russian women observed the last Sunday in February as their first International Women's Day and used it to protest against the first world war – and it has been used as an opportunity to campaign against wars ever since. In the 1920s suffragettes celebrated International Women's Day as part of their campaigning for votes for British women. In 1945, the Charter of the United Nations was the first international agreement to proclaim gender equality as a fundamental human right.

Last year over 10,000 people signed a petition launched by our fellow union, the T&G, calling for International Women's Day to be made a paid bank holiday.

Following our annual conference 2005, the FBU decided to take an active part in this campaign. This is about an extra day's holiday for everybody so I hope all members will get involved.

For more information, contact Vicky Knight at FBU head office.

# Sprinkler call to Government

## FIRE SAFETY

**F**BU General Secretary Matt Wrack has called on the Government to promote greater use of sprinklers in buildings to help save lives of FBU members and the public.

At a National Fire Sprinkler Network seminar

in February, he also proposed that the work regarding the physiological capabilities of firefighters undertaken as part of the ODPM's Building Disaster Assessment Group's research programme should be taken into account when deciding how big or how tall buildings should be before sprinklers are fitted.



The National Motorcycle Museum in Birmingham reopened in December 2004 after a fire that reduced it to the state above. The £20 million-plus rebuilding programme included a £1.2 million sprinkler system

## In brief

According to a BBC news website headline, a smoke alarm saved the lives of a mother and baby in Loughborough, Leicestershire. In fact it was "fire crews [who] rescued the 24-year-old woman and her six-month-old son" from the house fire. Despite this the BBC reported that: "Fire officials say everyone got out alive because of the smoke alarm."

Northumberland County Council is warning businesses not to pay hundreds of pounds for worthless advice on how to meet new fire safety legislation, the Regulatory Reform Order. Local Trading Standards received a complaint that a firm had claimed to have taken over responsibility from the fire service for fire safety at work – and was charging businesses £500 for advice.



The FBU has condemned the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority for giving pay rises of up to 27% to top managers when firefighters have received a 3.4% and cuts to fire cover abound. Fire chief Ken Knight got 17.5%, bringing his salary to £175,000. Other senior managers got increases of up to 27%.

FBU officials have written to fire brigade managements across the UK to press them to tackle the root causes of stress among officer members. The Health and Safety Executive has introduced management standards for work-related stress closely connected with the risk assessment process. A recent study commissioned by the FBU found widespread stress levels among officers.



West Yorkshire FBU has vowed to defend the jobs of frontline firefighters. The local fire authority says jobs may have to go because it has a £2.8m budget shortfall. It is already refusing overtime requests.

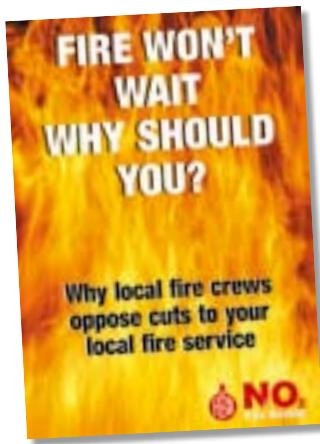
## CUTS FIGHTBACK

### Success for FBU campaign

A Union campaign against cuts to fire engines and firefighters working the retained duty system in Norfolk has succeeded.

At a meeting between the FBU and Norfolk Fire Authority, councillors confirmed that the Norfolk County Council Fire and Community Protection Review panel will not support any reduction in frontline fire cover.

Norfolk's chief fire officer had drafted a range of cuts options to meet a budget shortfall including removal of four retained fire crews and fire engines.



The Union mounted a high-profile campaign highlighting the importance of front line emergency cover.

Neil Day, Brigade Secretary

said: "We pay tribute to our retained and wholetime FBU members for uniting behind the campaign."

Meanwhile, South Yorkshire FBU has welcomed the decision by local MPs Jeff Ennis (Barnsley East and Mexborough) and John Healey (Wentworth) to write to chief fire officer Mark Smitherman insisting that two full-time pumps are provided at the new Dearne station.

The Union is appalled at a decision to reduce fire cover in the Dearne Valley area yet again. Despite a petition signed by 16,000 people opposing the closure of Brampton and Mexborough fire stations, the fire authority has decided to axe them.

## SOLIDARITY WITH NOTTS MEMBERS

Notts members are paying a voluntary levy of £5 a week to a fund to assist 34 members at Retford fire station. In September last year Notts fire crews voted by four to one to refuse to allow the imposition of ambulance duties on colleagues at Retford. The authority has been deducting 10% of their pay. Donations to: Nat West Bank Plc, ACCOUNT NAME: Notts Hardship Fund, ACCOUNT NO: 68013868, SORT CODE: 55 - 61 - 17.



Merseyside firefighters tackle a blaze in the Old Swan area

## FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

**M**erseyside members are disturbed to learn that their fire authority is facing a £7.5 million shortfall in its budget and that the first place management has looked for savings is firefighter posts.

Somehow the fire authority, captained by CFO Anthony McGuirk, managed to leave Merseyside with a record budget shortfall. FBU members there are asking anybody who will listen: How did it happen?

The answer may lie in some of the daffier ideas that the fire service has to endure. Unfortunately they usually start life in Merseyside. Fire bikes is one – sending an officer on a motorbike to automatic fire alarms. No PPE, only bike leathers; no safe system of work when investigating the fire call, just the warm comfort of an ARA for taking the risk.

Maybe it is the infamous ‘retention policy’ that the authority decided to agree without asking the good people of Merseyside. The elected members have recently agreed to pay CFO McGuirk and his senior management team a large sum of money to stay with the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

The figure is reported to be in excess of £50,000, divvied up between five of them. Some Merseyside FBU members have been rumoured to have started a whip round to beat this figure just to get rid of them.

Maybe it’s the fleet of top of the range cars that all senior officers drive around in. Even the fire dogs get driven around in expensive four wheel drives rather than in reconditioned service vehicles that is the practice in all other brigades.

### MERSEYSIDE

‘Even the fire dogs are driven around in four-wheel drives’

Maybe it’s all the free junkets that management and the elected members seem to be able to go on. Recently it was a first class trip to New York, even though it is authority policy to always travel standard class. The next one is coming up and is an all expenses paid trip to Hong Kong to watch the firefighter games. Maybe more FBU jobs will have to go to pay for this.

Or maybe it’s just financial mismanagement. Merseyside have reverted to type by blaming firefighter’s pensions on the shortfall and axing firefighter jobs as the answer, despite the fact that all fire and rescue services face the same problem.

Merseyside has managed to break all records with the biggest shortfall in living memory. Just a couple of months ago Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service got an excellent rating from the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA).

It seems that was just a little premature and maybe the CPA is sharpening its pencils again. It has been announced that the CPA is starting to assess the operational effectiveness of Merseyside – you could almost hear the audible groan of management when the upcoming assessment of the real problems occurring within Merseyside will have to be revealed. One of them was overheard to say: “I’ll get me coat then”.

Everybody knows it will not be an excellent award this time. And everyone also knows that the authority will blame the financial crisis on retired firefighters living longer than is financially prudent rather than the lack of frontline staff resulting in fire engine after fire engine being taken off the run every day.

# Stormy weather

GERMANA CANZI, SENIOR CLIMATE CAMPAIGNER, FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

**“**The British climate has always been unpredictable, but in recent years we appear to have reached new extremes. Flash floods, unseasonal snow, heat waves, and winter drought seem to have replaced the traditional patterns of sunny spells with frequent showers.

Our climate is changing and we are all starting to feel the effects. This is perhaps particularly true for firefighters who find themselves in the frontline when it comes to dealing with floods, hot weather heath or forest fires and damage from storms.

Climate change is the most serious threat facing humanity. While its effects in the UK are putting lives at risk, climate change is having devastating effects overseas, particularly in some of the world's poorest countries. Studies suggest

that 160,000 people worldwide die each year as a result of the changing climate.

Scientists agree that the major cause of the problem is a build up of man-made greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, particularly carbon dioxide. These gases are produced by burning fossil fuels, particularly oil, coal and gas.

If we are going to tackle the challenge posed by climate change, then we urgently need to reduce the level of this greenhouse gas pollution pumped into the atmosphere.

Tackling this problem is not easy. We all depend on energy in almost every area of our lives – and most of that energy comes from fossil fuels.

But the good news is that we can reduce our energy use. And cleaner alternative energy sources are becoming increasingly available.

Some of these new technologies are already finding their way into the UK fire and rescue service. In West London, Richmond Fire Station has installed photovoltaic panels on the station roof, that convert sunlight into electricity. These provide roughly three quarters of the power the station needs.

Improvements in technology are also making wind turbines a real option for generating energy.

Microturbines could soon become common, allowing householders to generate electricity from the wind.

Friends of the Earth has calculated that this country could generate 20-30 per cent of current domestic electricity and heat through micro-generation technologies in homes, such as solar panels, micro-wind turbines, solar water heating, small combined heat



A large, bright lightning bolt strikes the ground in a field of tall grass under a dark, stormy sky. The bolt is the central focus, with smaller branches of lightning visible above it. The horizon shows distant trees and a cloudy sky.

and power boilers, and biomass heating.

Of course, you don't have to generate your own electricity for it to be clean and green. You can shift from electricity companies that produce electricity mainly from coal, oil and nuclear (this will be disclosed on your bill) and move to companies that have a higher percentage of green power in their mix.

There are also lots of things that organisations, business and individuals can do to reduce the amount of energy they use – and at the same time reduce the amount of money spent on fuel bills.

Energy efficiency means not wasting energy. This can involve reducing the amount of heat loss in the home by improving insulation.

Fitting loft insulation is one of the most effective ways of cutting energy loss from the

home – and can save £80 to £100 on your fuel bills. Lagging the hot water tank, fitting double glazing, or simply closing the curtains at night can all make a difference.

You can also reduce the amount of energy you use in the home by turning off appliances rather than leaving them on standby. Figures show that the UK's standby habit uses up all the power generated by one nuclear power station.

Friends of the Earth wants to see EU legislation to stop manufacturers creating products that have unnecessary standby modes. When you buy electrical products, check if they have an efficiency label on them and buy the most efficient ones on the market.

Transport is another major source of carbon dioxide emissions. While some progress has been made on developing cleaner sources of engine fuel, we can all

reduce our emissions by leaving the car at home once in a while. Walking or cycling to work or to the local shop will help cut your fuel bills and help with fitness too. And if you plan to replace your car, buy one that is efficient and not a gas-guzzler.

Everyone can do their bit – but Friends of the Earth knows that if we are going to make a real difference to climate change, the Government must do its bit too.

That is why we are campaigning for new legislation which will require the Government to cut national carbon dioxide emissions by three per cent every year. We are contacting MPs across the country to ask them to support this new law.

→ Visit [www.thebigask.com](http://www.thebigask.com) and find out how you can ask your MP to do more.



## MESSAGE TO THE MINISTER:

# WE SAY

A survey carried out for the FBU shows firefighters, officers, managers and control staff do not believe the new controls will improve either firefighter safety or the response to incidents.

**R**egional controls are an unwanted and unnecessary last minute bolt-on to the Government's change agenda, the FBU told the House of Commons Select Committee investigating the move. The Select Committee was told that a survey carried out for the union showed only 3% of fire service personnel surveyed support the move to regional controls.

The poll showed that firefighters, officers, managers and control staff do not believe the new controls will improve either firefighter safety or the response to incidents. And the more senior you were, the less likely you were to support the proposals.

Matt Wrack, FBU General Secretary said: "Those who will have to deal with the consequences of these proposals clearly have little confidence in them. The clear message from the frontline is that we do not want Whitehall-imposed regional control rooms.

In evidence, the union said the FireControl Project plans are risky, expensive and add little to what is already in place or will be provided by FireLink, the proposed new radio and data transmission system. The union accused



Tayside members  
campaigning

times from the time the call is taken to arrival at the incident. One Civil Servant said the controls would simply measure response in a different way.

They also said they had no final business case, still only had project estimates not budgets and accepted that a lot of costs had simply been kept off the project's books as the union had said. The written evidence to the Select Committee revealed that, while fire authorities are obliged to formally support the project because it is in the National Framework, almost all of them had key concerns.

London revealed it had only recently moved to support while reserving the right not to fully sign up. It accepted its new control was not resilient and it did not move into it until nearly three years after 9/11.

General Secretary Matt Wrack, President Ruth Winters, Val Salmon EC member for emergency fire control staff and Jack Ford, officers' national executive member and an officer in Greater Manchester's control all gave evidence. They told the committee the regional fire control proposals did not come from either the Bain Review or the 2003 White Paper and had little support within the fire service.

**95%**  
**SAY REGIONAL CONTROLS  
WILL NOT IMPROVE  
FIREFIGHTER SAFETY**

the Government of deliberately confusing the two projects because the £988 million FireControl project will not deliver a measurably better service.

It challenged the committee to identify any improvements to service delivery that was actually provided by FireControl. The union pointed to a central flaw which is there is a big difference between providing a different service and providing a better service.

ODPM Civil Servants had already signalled a retreat from a key claim that regional controls will cut response

**95%**  
**SAY REGIONAL CONTROLS WILL  
NOT IMPROVE FIRE SERVICE  
RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS**

# NO

**94%**  
SAID THE GOVERNMENT  
SHOULD NOT PROCEED WITH ITS  
REGIONAL CONTROLS PLAN

## POLL RESULTS

**Do you believe regional controls will improve firefighter safety?**

95% said **NO**, 2% said **YES**  
3% said DON'T KNOW.

**Do you believe such a move will improve fire service response to incidents?**

95% said **NO**, 3% said **YES**  
2% said DON'T KNOW

**Based on your knowledge, do you believe the Government should proceed with its plan to move to regional controls?**

94% said **NO**, 3% said **YES**  
3% said DON'T KNOW.

*This research was conducted between 11 and 17 January 2006. YouGov interviewed a net sample of 2,515 current and former FBU members. Results are unweighted.*

For more information visit [www.controlcare.org.uk](http://www.controlcare.org.uk)



## The alternative



"We have never been convinced the case for regional controls has ever been made at any level", says national officer Geoff

Ellis who has spear-headed the controls campaign. "The proposals lack genuine resilience, are high risk, very expensive and potentially a significant drain on financial resources for years to come.

"Our solution builds on and utilises all our existing controls and is based on the knowledge and skills of our own members at all levels. Resilience controls would be resilience-prepared Fire Control Centres which will provide

true resilience and emergency response capability to new dimension type incidents.

"They would be capable of preserving the critical national infrastructure while supporting a robust 24/365 emergency response capability to the general population in line with the commitments set out in local Integrated Risk Management Plans.

"In this way a genuinely UK-wide system – not just England – could be built on a network of Resilience Controls. One ResCon would be designated for each of the 9 Regional Management Board areas in England, plus one ResCon for Wales, one ResCon for Scotland and one ResCon for Northern Ireland.

"The UK-wide network of ResCons would also be responsible for emergency mobilisation and support of brigade function for the brigade in which they are situated. The ResCons would be connected to each other to provide for UK-wide coordination and resilience in the event of one or more ResCons becoming unavailable.

"ResCons would be responsible for coordinating the required regional or national response for or from the area of the UK that they cover in line with Regional or UK-wide response plans. The existing Fire Control Centres within brigades would actually carry out the emergency mobilisations.

"Re-thinking resilience would also allow us to look at a key area which we have raised directly with ODPM and was a central issue raised by 9/11. Neither FiReControl nor FireLink address the issue – not at this stage anyway – of fireground communications.

# MEMBERS CONS FRESH PROPOSAL

**F**resh Government proposals for fire service pensions have been put out to detailed consultation with members. They were received just before the start of the union's recall conference and followed a series of talks between the FBU and ministers.

The recall conference agreed that the proposals go out to consultation and supported a Northern Ireland resolution that this would be followed by a further recall conference.

Concerns remained about ill-health retirement. The proposals – the first in writing – follow a series of meetings over the last 12 months and a detailed consultation with the FBU and fire authorities.

Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick wrote to General Secretary Matt Wrack to "set out the basis on which we see matters being taken forward on each of the main issues." In it, he withdrew the proposal to increase the minimum retirement age to 55.

But he outlined the Government's position that the proposals on ill-health retirements, due to come in on 1 April, will go ahead.

He said the proposals on the injury scheme were part of a wider public sector review and would be published later this spring and subject to consultation. Until any new scheme comes in, the existing injury and compensa-

tion arrangements will continue to operate.

Current firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS) would maintain their link with wholifetime pay for ill-health and injury pension purposes. This became a key FBU concern when it emerged that ODPM intended to break that link and base future ill-health and injury payments on much lower "core" RDS earnings.

Firefighters working RDS will have access to the New Firefighters Pension Scheme

(NFPS), securing a pension for the first time. The Government hopes its lower contribution rate of 8.5% will also tempt people to quit the current scheme.

The ODPM would not move on the NFPS retirement age of 60. This was despite clear warnings from the FBU and employers that this will lead to a spate of ill-health and injury pensions as older firefighters succumb to the physical demands of the job.

Officers' flexi duty allowance and other

**'No one is endorsing these proposals but it is important that members consider the new position'**

Delegates agree members will decide



# IDEALS



PICTURES: PAUL HERRMANN

Members of the National Women's Committee (left to right) Kerry Baigent, Dona Feltham, Emma Carr and Sam Rye discuss the issues at the Southport recall conference

currently pensionable allowances such as London weighting will continue to be pensionable under the current scheme and the NFPS. The union's claim for emergency fire control staff to have access to the NFPS will start to be considered by a working group within a month. The Government had no objections in principle, but it said it would have to consider any extra costs.

The FBU also had concerns over the transitional period between the existing FPS being

withdrawn for new entrants and the New FPS being put in place. New entrants after 1 April will be placed in the existing FPS until the New FPS is put in place. If they are killed or injured, benefits would be paid under the FPS until the transfer to the New FPS.

The Executive Council withdrew its recommendation for a strike ballot. General Secretary Matt Wrack told the conference no-one thought the proposals were a great victory, although it was obvious there had been movement.

"No one feels this is any great victory," he said. "The attack on ill-health pensions has not stopped, but we have movement on the retirement age for members of the existing scheme.

"We have secured protection for firefighters working the retained duty system who could have lost out significantly if they were injured on duty. But we could not persuade them to move on the retirement age in the new scheme which, at 60, is ludicrous.

"We are moving into talks on emergency fire control staff having access to the new FPS. We have also seen off the moves to take Flexi Duty Allowance and other allowances out of pensionable pay which would have really hit some officer members.

"There has been some movement and we are not where we were six weeks ago before our campaign stepped up a gear.

"No one is endorsing these proposals but it is important that members consider the new position.

"There are several keys areas over which we will go on campaigning and pressing our case. The important thing now is that members get a chance to see the proposals, consider them and tell us their views."

"If members say they are not acceptable and that strike action is necessary then we would start the balloting process very quickly. But it is members who will decide."

## PROPOSALS AT A GLANCE

■ Proposal to increase the minimum pension age to 55 has been withdrawn. Retirement at 60 in the new scheme for new entrants remains and the FBU will continue to campaign against this.

■ Firefighters working the retained duty system will be able to join the new pension scheme, gaining a pension for the first time. The union is awaiting the decision of the House of Lords in a bid to get RDS firefighters access to the existing FPS.

■ The threat that serving RDS firefighters who joined the new scheme would lose the existing link to wholifetime earnings for ill-health and injury purposes has been withdrawn.

■ The new injury scheme has not been published and any changes will follow consultation. Until then, the current scheme will remain in place.

■ The Government would not budge on changes which will make it more difficult to secure an ill-health pension.

■ Talks will start within a month on allowing emergency fire control staff access to the new FPS. The Government is not opposed in principle to the move, but has concerns about possible extra costs.

■ All currently pensionable allowances such as Flexi Duty Allowance and London Weighting will continue to be pensionable under both the existing FPS and the New FPS.





**F**irefighters working the retained duty system took their fight for equal pension and sick pay rights to the House of Lords on 11 and 12 January. In a case billed by *The Lawyer* magazine as one of the most important of 2006, the Law Lords are expected to hand down their judgment towards the end of March.

The case centres on the exclusion of firefighters working retained duty from the pension scheme and their worse treatment under the sick pay scheme. The union's case is that retained duty firefighters do the same work and that discriminating between retained and wholetime is unlawful under the part-time workers regulations.

## 'Our employers fail to recognise that fires don't distinguish between duty systems'

The final outcome will affect retained firefighters in fire and rescue services across the UK. Tam Mitchell, the FBU's national executive council member for retained firefighters said pensions and sick pay are the last major hurdles for retained firefighters.

"The FBU fought for equal pay, redundancy rights and annual leave for retained firefighters. The pensions and sick pay issues are the last major hurdles and hopefully this case will bring the right result.

"Some of what I have heard about the differences between retained and wholetime is nonsense. We've always been used as front-line firefighters, we're mobilised to the same incidents and we all work as a unit.

"Our employers fail to recognise that

# SAME JOB SAME PENSION

The FBU's fight for fair pensions and sick pay rights for firefighters working the retained duty system is now before the House of Lords. It could be one of the most important legal cases of the year.

fires don't distinguish between duty systems. It really is time they stopped trying to look for minor variations in an attempt to justify treating the firefighters working retained duty differently."

The case centres on the exclusion of firefighters working retained duty from the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and their worse treatment under the sick pay scheme. They say they are being treated differently because they are part-time workers and that this is unlawful.

## Minute differences

The employer's case rests on pointing to minute differences between the contracts of retained duty and wholetime firefighters. This, they say, means that whole time and retained

firefighters are not engaged in "the same or broadly similar work" and so are not covered by new Government regulations that prohibit discrimination against part-time workers.

The employer's case is based on a "spot the difference" argument about the work and contracts of retained crews and wholetime crews. The union's legal team argue that there is no real difference. The employer's legal team suggested at an earlier hearing that retained firefighters do little more than attend incidents until wholimers arrive.

## Scraping the barrel

The test case is being taken by 12 firefighters working retained duty, six from Kent and six from Berkshire. These 12 "lead" cases have been whittled down from 12,000 cases started by FBU members in employment tribunals in 2001.

Colin Elliot, a retained firefighter from Wokingham in Berkshire, and one of the firefighters named in the test case, said: "I've been a retained duty firefighter for 22 years and we deal with any incident. We attended the fire which nearly destroyed Windsor Castle, and that was major news. In 1990 we spent all day recovering bodies and putting out fires when there was the M4 motorway pile up that claimed 13 lives.

"We live and work in the communities we serve and operationally we do the same work. Retained duty firefighters feel very strongly about this issue. I have seen colleagues leave the service after 25 and more years without a pension and that is unjust.

"At the original tribunal I heard the employers arguing about some small differences and some of those were wrong. They really were scraping the bottom of the barrel in some of the claims they were making. Their claims about differences between wholetime and retained simply do not stand up."

FBU National Officer Paul Woolstenholmes said: "This is an important case aimed at securing fairness and justice for thousands of firefighters working retained duty across the UK. They are first class firefighters and they should not be given second class employment rights.

"They have worked in the front line at almost every major incident. Huge areas of this country rely on the retained duty system and when the public are being rescued they don't stop to ask your employment status.

"In looking for little differences between contracts they failed to acknowledge the big picture which is retained firefighters are firefighters and take the same risks. If the employers were ever at an incident they would not be in any doubt about that."

**The employer's case rests on pointing to minute differences between the contracts of retained duty and wholetime firefighters**

→ The union is represented by the leading employment lawyers Thompsons solicitors, Robin Allen QC and barrister Martin Seaward.

# WHAT DOES A FIRE SAFETY ADVISER DO?

It may not have the immediate satisfaction of putting out a fire, but fire safety advisers still have a rewarding job



PICTURES: ROBIN JONES

**W**hen a building is ablaze, everyone welcomes the arrival of fire crews. But fire safety advisers don't expect a rapturous welcome. For it's not just rogue employers or dodgy landlords who fear they may be found wanting when it comes to maintaining fire safety.

As Allen Westerby, a fire safety adviser with Dorset Fire and Rescue Service puts it: "There aren't many people who relish you going round and inspecting their buildings. We can cost employers a lot of money if there is no fire alarm, or not enough fire doors. We have to make sure their buildings are safe for their employees and the public. If they are dangerous, we can close the building and prohibit its use."

The law can help focus minds. But, he stresses, the emphasis is very much on prevention, reducing deaths, injuries and damage to property. This is done by ensuring safety regulations are properly observed and pointing out where change is needed.

"The odd prosecution jolts people, but most of the time we are trying to get people to think about fire safety as part of their daily lives, avoiding accidents and ensuring things are stored safely for instance."

Allen and fellow fire safety advisers are at the forefront of fire safety and the fire prevention regime. They are steeped in fire safety laws such as the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations, 1997. These require employers to reduce the risk of fire, maintain any precautions necessary and make sure employees are properly trained.





Advisers need to be able to visualise a plan in three dimensions and work out how people would escape if a fire broke out

It's a varied and responsible job. Advisers manage their own workload, book visits, handle building regulations applications, complaints and liaise with agencies dealing with licensing, public protection and care standards.

They need to be able to visualise a plan in three dimensions and work out how people would escape if fire broke out. There is however, no escape from paperwork that must be completed accurately and to strict deadlines.

Advisers carry out individual inspections, but are part of a team that provides support with difficult decisions.

Attention is focused where risk of fire is greatest – hotels, nursing homes, workplaces and large shops. But even the smallest premises may expect regular visits. Once inside, advisers check fire precautions have been maintained and any changes comply with current standards. They encourage good practice, suggest improvements, and identify deficiencies. If this approach fails the law must be used. Sanctions can include written notices, fines and even imprisonment in extreme cases such as a factory owner failing to comply with a prohibition notice.

Rewarding work? Over to Allen: "Although it lacks the immediate satisfaction of putting out a fire or rescuing someone, it is good when a dangerous situation has been put right or improvements are made which increase people's safety from fire."

→ Allen Westerby has been a firefighter with the Dorset brigade for nearly 20 years, switching to community safety five years ago.

## Local Hero

### DALTON POWELL

BEM Rep

#### Energy to spare



There's no doubting Dalton Powell likes a challenge. The Nottingham firefighter is World Police and Firefighter Games champion in track and field events – a title he has held for the past six years.

He has also just taken up a new challenge at work – as Nottingham rep for the FBU's black and ethnic minority (BEM) members, keen to play a more active role in ensuring all union members get a fair deal

Dalton, who joined the fire service eight years ago in London, signed up for BEM membership at training college, when he first joined the union. "A BEM rep came and spoke about the support network it offered to anyone who encountered discrimination. It happened to me when I was in the military, so I knew first hand how important such support can be. The last thing you want to do is let it swim around your head and fester. It's really important people respect each other at work – particularly jobs like ours where team work is so important.

"Historically, the fire service has been seen as predominantly white and male-dominated. It still is, and the union seeks to work in partnership with brigades – which is why it is important to reach out to people and encourage people from ethnic minorities to join up."

Dalton's passion for outreach chimes with his current work in community safety, on secondment to Nottingham HQ from Stockhill fire station. It's a role he is relishing.

Dalton's community safety duties include visiting schools and youth centres, including those he frequented in his youth, spreading the fire safety message. He has recently been involved with outreach work among Asian and Bangladeshi youths.

As well as his champion title from the World Police and Firefighter games, Dalton is also training for the European Masters championships for athletes over 35 in Poland this summer.

But he will be putting a lot of energy into promoting community safety and, as BEM rep, encouraging more Black and Asian citizens to get involved.

→ More info: [www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/sections/bemm](http://www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/sections/bemm)

# A formidable opponent

A new national screening programme could save 1,200 lives every year

## BOWEL CANCER

**F**orty years ago, Bobby Moore triumphantly lifted the World Cup trophy into the air. At just 25 years of age, Bobby had led England to victory in a thrilling World Cup final against West Germany. But 27 years later, at the age of 51, Bobby lost a different match against a more formidable opponent – bowel cancer.

Bowel cancer is a serious problem. Over 35,000 people are diagnosed every year, making it the third most common cancer in the UK. And like Bobby, over 16,000 people lose their lives to bowel cancer every year. Less than half of all patients survive for five years after their diagnosis.

The survival rate is low because many cancers are diagnosed too late. In Bobby's case, his cancer wasn't spotted for several years. Left untreated, it progressed to an advanced stage, when it was much harder to treat. Spotting bowel cancer early is the key to improving survival rates. If this happens, over 9 in 10 patients can be successfully treated.

### Spotting it early

Later this year, people in parts of England will be encouraged to send off stool samples in the post. This may sound like the makings of a large practical joke, but it's actually part of a new national bowel screening programme. The programme aims to detect bowel cancers early and will roll out through England from 2006, and through Scotland from 2007. Screening will be offered to men and women aged 60-69 every 2 years.

People who are eligible will receive a kit that they can use in the privacy of their own homes. It contains a simple way of collecting a small stool sample, which is then sent to a laboratory. There, scientists will look for small hidden traces of blood. This is not

### BOWEL CANCER SYMPTOMS

- The most common bowel cancer symptoms
- bleeding from the bottom without any obvious reason
- a persistent change in bowel motions to looser or more frequent bowel motions
- stomach pain, especially if severe
- a lump in your stomach



Bobby Moore won the World Cup against West Germany but lost against bowel cancer

a sure-fire way of telling if someone has cancer, but it can identify people who may need further tests.

Collecting a stool sample may sound messy or unpleasant, but it could end up saving your life. Cancer Research UK scientists believe that bowel screening could save 1,200 lives every year.

### Knowing the symptoms

Like any screening test, bowel screening is not completely foolproof. So it is also important to be aware of the symptoms of bowel cancer and get unusual changes checked out. If you spot a common bowel cancer symptom (see box), and it lasts for over four to six weeks, go and see your GP. The symptoms are unlikely to be caused by cancer, but it is best to play safe.

### Prevention

Early detection is not the only way of dealing with bowel cancer. Bowel cancer is actually a largely preventable disease. Two in three cases could be avoided through healthy lifestyles, especially maintaining a healthy

bodyweight and being physically active.

You can also reduce your risk by eating a healthy, balanced diet with lots of fibre, fish, fruit and vegetables, and less red or processed meat, cutting down on alcohol and not smoking. Cancer Research UK's Reduce the Risk website [www.reducetherisk.org.uk](http://www.reducetherisk.org.uk) has more information on how healthy lifestyles can reduce your risk of bowel cancer.

In the fight against bowel cancer, the best weapon that we have is scientific research. Our scientists are constantly improving our understanding of the disease and developing better ways of preventing, detecting and treating it.

Cancer Research UK's Bobby Moore Fund was set up in 1993 specifically to fund bowel cancer research. If you would like to support the Bobby Moore Fund, you can make a donation yourself, join one of our races, or even set up your own fundraising event.

→ Find out more at [www.bobbymoorefund.org](http://www.bobbymoorefund.org). This article was written by Ed Yong, cancer information officer, Cancer Research UK.

## Medically unfit for operational duty

**Q** I have been medically certified as unfit to continue operational duties as a firefighter. I would like to leave the brigade on an ill health pension. The brigade have refused to do so and have required me to undertake non-operational work within my role map and on the basis of my Pay and Terms and Conditions as a firefighter?

**A** Until the Firefighters Pension Scheme was amended in September 2004, the brigade would have been duty bound to retire you on grounds of ill-health.

This was established following a legal test case pursued by West Yorkshire members to the Court of Appeal.

In September 2004 the pension scheme was amended and does now allow brigades to keep on members who are not fit for operational firefighting duties.

It is important to note that you continue to be employed as a firefighter at a firefighter's rate of pay and on terms and conditions for your role.

In particular, it is noted that the duties you have been asked to undertake are within your role map. The brigade is entitled to do this.

Different considerations would arise if the brigade tried to transfer you to another job, not as a firefighter, on different pay and/or different terms/conditions.

## Deducting my wages

**Q** My employers have made a deduction from my wages which I think is wrong. What should I do?

**A** Consult your FBU representative. You will be advised to challenge the deduction by way of grievance under the Grey Book. If that fails to resolve the matter, your representative may need to

SUSANNAH KARAVANIS



Fit to return to work? GP and brigade disagree

## Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU.

bring Employment Tribunal proceedings for you based upon an unlawful deduction of wages.

Please note there are strict time limits such that Employment Tribunal proceedings have to be taken within three months of the deduction and cannot be commenced until 28 days after you have lodged the grievance in writing.

There are circumstances in which this time limit can be extended but the safest course is to lodge the grievance early so that the 28 day time period will expire before the three-month time limit.

Tribunal proceedings can then be commenced after the 28 days have expired but within the three-month time limit.

### Asbestos-related condition

**Q** I was an operational firefighter and retired from the brigade some years ago having reached 55. I was in good health then but have since discovered that I suffer from an asbestos related condition which I believe was contracted in the course of my employment in the Fire Service. What should I do?

**A** Register your details on the FBU Asbestos database at [www.fbu.org.uk/member/legal/index.php](http://www.fbu.org.uk/member/legal/index.php).

Apply immediately for FBU legal assistance by calling 0808 100 60 61.

You may also be entitled to an Injury Award under the Firefighters Pension Scheme. This is known as an "After Appearing Injury". Write immediately to the brigade informing them of the position and requesting a medical examination with a view to an Injury Award being granted.

## Returning from long-term sick

**Q** I have been absent on long-term sick leave. The brigade Medical Adviser has certified that I am fit to return to work. My GP disagrees. The brigade is refusing to accept my GP's certificates that I am unfit to return to duty.

**A** This type of dispute is governed by Section 5, Part B.29 of the Grey Book. Such differences of opinion have to be resolved by means of an independent medical opinion. Contact your FBU representative to assist you in nominating an independent doctor. If you cannot agree with the brigade as to who is to be appointed as the independent doctor, the Grey Book provides for the matter to be referred to the NJC Joint Secretaries for decision.

## Knocked off my bike

**Q** I was hit by a car while cycling when off duty. The driver has been found guilty of dangerous driving. I am at work but still not fully recovered and my cycle was damaged.

**A** The FBU legal service extends to cover compensation claims for accidents such as this outside the workplace. Apply for FBU legal assistance by calling 0808 100 60 61. Do not delay as strict time limits apply to injury compensation claims.

Write in with your legal problem to [legal@fbu.org.uk](mailto:legal@fbu.org.uk) and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

# 'You've got to get in there and get on with it'

FRASER BAND PHOTOGRAPHY

A bad day on the hill is better than a good day in the office, says Heather Lawrie

**“**I have always been an outdoor type, enjoying hillwalking, rock climbing and anything else that involved getting covered in mud. I played rugby for some years, getting to represent my country. But it was the man I'm now married to who introduced me to winter climbing back in November 1995. He was a member of a mountain rescue team so I felt as if I should trust him on this one!

We arrived at Creag Dubh, near Newtonmore at 4pm. I was kitted out with rigid boots, crampons and a set of Vertige ice axes, which I still use today. He had said this would be a bit of pre-pub fun. Before long, we were soon confronted with a melting waterfall, which he disappeared into as darkness encroached. I thought he was mad, but so as not to let the side down I set off, mimicking his actions, trying not to look like Bambi in Gortex. It was a steep learning curve, a baptism of fire, but I was certainly hooked.

**STRENGTH**

The more you climb in winter, the more you enjoy it. The secret is not to shatter the ice by hacking like a maniac, but to place the tips of the axes and the crampons on your feet into the ice. Hit too hard and the ice falls

off; not enough and you don't have enough placement and grip. Once you are committed to the climb, often there is no going back. You use these tools and your own physical strength to climb upwards to the top.

I live a couple of hours from some of the larger Scottish climbing areas, so when conditions are suitable and if we are both free, we head off to find whatever routes we can. Cairngorm, Lochnagar and Ben Nevis are popular places for climbing, but winter climbing can be very weather dependant. The opportunity to climb is limited by my shift patterns.

**SOLITUDE**

I love the sense of solitude that comes with climbing, though I'm not brave or mad enough to climb alone. We try and get away two weekends in eight. It's always worth the wait, amazingly satisfying, and a different kind of challenge to those I face at work, out on an appliance.

The Cairngorms have a lot of corries – hollowed out rock formations with very steep sides – which can be very good for climbing. When the wind blows over ridges, wind-blown snow can pack and form a cornice. It can be like trying to climb through porridge or hacking out coal at times. The secret is,

always, not to hack too hard. You don't want the consolidated snow to fall off. If a great lump of snow comes flying down it could take both you and the person below off the mountain. Winter climbing is a calculated personal risk, I do it for the challenge, both mental and physical.

**UNPREDICTABLE**

It's all about pushing yourself, without being foolhardy or reckless. But even though you've researched the route and checked the weather, you can never really be sure what's ahead of you. Conditions can change very suddenly – a climb is always going to be unpredictable, which is part of the allure, I suppose. You've got to get in there and get on with it – adapt and overcome, using experience and local knowledge.

Getting back down from a climb if something has gone wrong can be a major operation, it is often simpler to carry on up though there are times when it makes sense to abseil off. We were on a climb just after Christmas, the weather changed without warning to blizzard conditions and we had to get off as quickly as possible; that was one of those times.

If it's an easy route and you're not looking for too much of a





A snow-covered Ben Nevis is reflected in the Caledonian Canal

challenge, just getting to the top, getting off and getting back into your car with nice cozy feet and a nice cup of tea is just fine. If it's a hard technical route where you are really pushing yourself, it can be bloody hard work, knocking both physically and mentally but amazingly exhilarating.

#### NOWHERE TO HIDE

Climbing is about pushing yourself more than anything else. Nature's the most powerful force in the world, and you've got to have respect for it. Otherwise it can kill you. When you're half way up a route you've got nowhere to hide. It's just you and it. And the weather. If you do hit unexpected problems – and you will, your adventure can turn into an "epic".

Climbing certainly focuses you. It helps you decide on what's important in life, away from the pressures of work. It is very empowering to get out there on the mountainside. And it's a very good way to spend a day off, remember: "A bad day on the hill is better than a good day in the office."

#### HEATHER LAWRIE

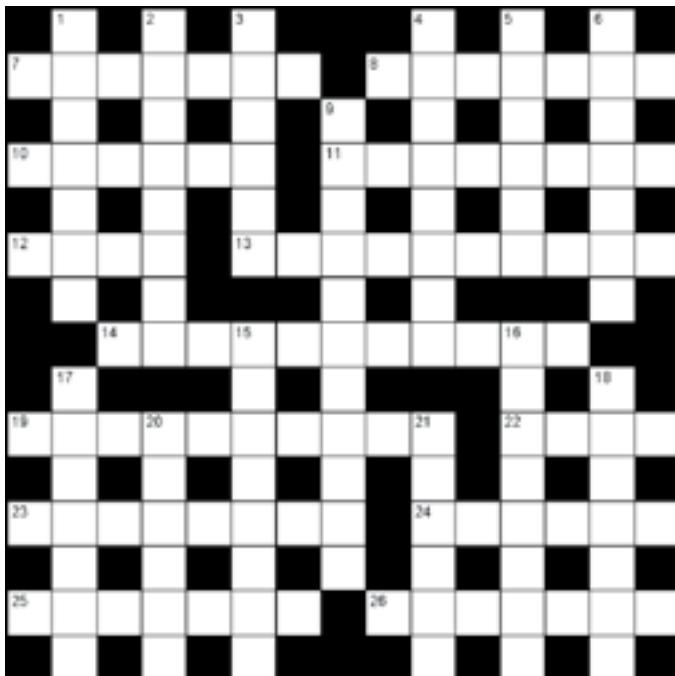
**Heather** is an operational leading firefighter at Macalpine Road station in Dundee, and the Scottish Women's Committee secretary.

→ Useful websites

**British Mountaineering Council**  
[www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk)

**Mountaineering Council of Scotland**  
[www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk](http://www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk)

## Quick Crossword

**ACROSS**

- 7 Seek the views of others – and then disregard them? (7)
- 8 Everyone needs one, with pay (7)
- 10 The quicker we get there, the less is done! (6)
- 11 One who leads a life of study (8)
- 12 Untruths (4)
- 13 12s, damned 12s and... (10)
- 14 Incapable of destruction, allegedly (11)
- 19 Site of massive fire in December (10)
- 22 Tony, who quit parliament to be more active in politics (4)
- 23 Wind instrument (8)
- 24 Slow walk, amble (6)
- 25 Ideal conditions for forest fire (4-3)
- 26 Raising temperature, or household equipment for doing it (7)

**DOWN**

- 1 Wandering, usually from pasture to pasture (7)
- 2 Hired killer, originally one high on hashish (8)
- 3 Tool for gripping small objects or bending or cutting wire (6)
- 4 The Louvre's most famous exhibit (4,4)
- 5 Making no noise (6)
- 6 Leonardo, painter of 4 (2,5)
- 9 Old fashioned name for camper van (11)
- 15 Plant where oil is processed (8)
- 16 Free (8)
- 17 Bulk gold or silver (7)
- 18 Fishing (7)
- 20 Imposed time to be off the streets (6)
- 21 Flag, or dry cleaning cloth (6)

Answers next issue

MARK J TERRILL/AP/EMPICS



## Prize Quiz

### Win an iPod!

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours.  
This month: Fire in song. Just name the six bands by solving our clues!

Title of a song by the band	Clue
1 Fire	Formed in Dublin in 1976. Lead singer is Live Aid star and friend of Saint Bob.
2 I'm On Fire	1984 song from Boss's album 'Born in the USA'.
3 Love Fire	1987 song from Manchester band with red-headed lead singer.
4 Light My Fire	Lots of cover versions but originally released in '67 by this West Coast band.
5 Fire	Spicy California band renamed in 1983. Has a band member who goes by the name of 'Flea'.
6 Walk Through The Fire	May 1984 single by this 'angelic' co-founder of Genesis.



### HOW TO ENTER

Send your answers to the prize quiz on a postcard to: Prize Competition (March 2006) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries. Competition closes March 31.

POLIFOTO/EMPICS

AP/EMPICS





# StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

## Taxing problem

 Bungling NO DPM doesn't only have problems with John Prescott's Council Tax. They appear to have other taxing problems, this time with the road tax for New Dimension Incident Response Units. NO DPM's latest botch up left half the New Dimension IRUs off the run, some brigades without the ability to cope with any chemical incidents (not only the terrorist type) and the taxpayer with a £16,000 bill for special couriers to deliver valid tax discs. Once again (sadly it happened in London to the very first IRUs) NO DPM had not taken care of the tax discs. These vehicles are free from paying the tax, but still have to display a valid road tax disc before they can be used on public roads. **It left half the IRUs off the run for several days in early January and NO DPM bogs running around trying to solve the problem.** Eventually they put their hands on the discs (they are free to the taxpayer but still have to be displayed) but then ran up a bill of £16,000 getting them couriered out. It just fills you with confidence that the fire service is safe in their hands and that they really do believe in value for money.

## Wee wah

 Does "wah wee, wah wee" sound better than "wee wah, wee wah"? **Should fire engines be red? Why is the sky blue?** OK the third question is not being addressed by a new NO DPM funded research project through the new

fire procurement service FireBuy. But the first two questions are. The research was announced in the House of Lords which was told the research will examine the colour, sound and general visibility of fire engines – that's sirens and paintjob to you. Although one newspaper report suggests the project will cost £100,000, Station Cat has been told the project may be more likely to cost around £250,000. That's leaving aside the need to re-spray all vehicles and rebrand the service at a cost of around £30 million if red is not the colour. It brings back memories of the Royal Mail "re-branding" itself as Consignia at a cost reportedly in the region of £60 million. It was a terrible mistake and the move was quickly reversed. Let's hope NO DPM and FireBuy took note.

## Cold comfort

 All of us were genuinely touched by the comments of London Fire and Emergency Planning Association chair Val Shawcross and London Fire Commissioner Ken Knight following the deaths of Firefighters Bill Faust and Adam Meere on 20 July 2004 at Bethnal Green. Bill and Adam were rescued by their colleagues but later died of their severe injuries. In a statement issued on the day Mr Knight said: "This is a tragic day for all the fire service. I am immensely proud of the professionalism of the London Fire Brigade and in particular these two brave firefighters who so tragically lost their lives. We are working to support their colleagues and families."

In a personal note in the order of service at the Memorial Service on 29 September 2004 Mr Knight wrote of the firefighters who "daily risk their lives to save the lives of others". He described the fire and rescue service as "part of a large family with common goals, common compassion for those in need". The opening hymn at the service was Abide With Me: "When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, help of the helpless, O abide with me." Then Chair of LFEPA Val Shawcross read from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians 4:13-18 which offers salvation to "those who are left alive" and that "with such thoughts as these you should comfort one another." Bishop Stack offered in prayer: "ask, and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."

However Station Cat is somewhat disappointed at the treatment meted out to two other firefighters who suffered greatly on that day and have been unable to work since, traumatised by what happened. One was based in the command unit and another assisted in bringing out his gravely injured colleagues Bill Faust and Adam Meere. **The fire service is showing no signs of wanting to abide with these two firefighters. They were asked and have been told no. The compassion shown has been of the cold variety.** Their fate is doors slammed shut. Too ill to work since the fire, one has had his sick pay stopped, and was referred to Social Security who told him he would have to sell his house. Another has had his sick pay halved. Station Cat hopes Mr Knight and Ms Shawcross will address these aberrations and consider the words from John

Donne's poem which was read out at the memorial service: "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never ask for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee...."

→ If you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into then e-mail: [stationcat@fbi.org.uk](mailto:stationcat@fbi.org.uk)



# 25-year badges



**Pat Fielder** (left) Goole station Humberside being presented with 25 year badge by Matt Wrack General Secretary



**Keith Griffin** (left) (Hammersmith/ green watch/ London ) Western command receiving his 25 year badge



**John Brooksbank** (left) Goole, Humberside receiving 25 year badge from Matt Wrack General Secretary



**Sid Foreman**, Herts (right) being presented 25 year badge by Pete Golding (Stevenage Rep).



**Barry Thompson** (left) Goole Humberside being presented 25 year badge by Matt Wrack General Secretary



**Po Odlin** (right) North Lincoln Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from John Taylor, Lincolnshire Officers Branch Secretary



**Billy Carruthers** (right) West Branch Rep and receives his 25 year badge from Nick Ginty, Officers Chair at Harrow Training Centre



**Aidan McKenna** receives his 25 year badge from Group chair Del Warman and piper B Flook



**Chris Ward** (right) New Dimensions, receives his 25 year badge from John Taylor Lincolnshire Officers Branch Secretary

Please send your photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



London regional organiser Paul Embrey (centre right) presents Mick Binns of PDA section with his 25 year badge

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## CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR NEXT OF KIN

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

## FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE **0800 100 6061**

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

